

THE DISEASE

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

The infection is spread by direct contact with infected individuals (for example, sharing a glass or cigarette, or kissing) or through the air via droplets of respiratory secretions (for example, coughing or sneezing).

WHO IS AT RISK?

Meningitis can strike at any age; however, certain groups have a greater risk for contracting the disease:

- College students, particularly freshmen, who live in campus residence halls. Social aspects of college life also appear to be risk factors. Smoking, exposure to second-hand smoke, excessive alcohol consumption, and bar patronage all increase the chances that one will contract meningitis from an infected individual.
- Anyone in close contact with a known case of meningitis.
- Anyone with an upper respiratory infection and/or a weak immune system.
- Anyone traveling to endemic areas of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

Wellness Center
119 University Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
PHONE (412)383-1800
FAX (412)-383-1846
www.studenthealth.pitt.edu

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
POLICE DEPARTMENT
FOR CAMPUS EMERGENCY, (412)624-2121
FOR NON-EMERGENCY (412)624-4040

HOSPITALS/CLINICS

UPMC MONTIFIORE
3459 FIFTH AVENUE, OAKLAND
PHONE (412)647-2345

UPMC PRESBYTERIAN
200 LOTHROP STREET, OAKLAND
PHONE (412)647-2345

UPMC SHADYSIDE
5230 CENTRE AVENUE, SHADYSIDE
PHONE (412)623-2121

ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
3441 FORBES AVENUE
PITTSBURGH, PA 15213
PHONE (412)578-8060

INTERNET RESOURCES

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL
AND PREVENTION
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo

AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH ASSOCIATION
www.acha.org

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
www.health.state.pa.us



UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

Facts About Meningitis

Information for
Students and Parents

THE DISEASE

WHAT IS MENINGITIS?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection. It can occur in two forms—as either meningococcal meningitis, an inflammation that affects the brain and spinal cord, or as meningococemia, the presence of bacteria in the blood. Permanent brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, limb amputation, kidney failure, or death can result from the infection.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms are similar to those of influenza and include high fever, rash, vomiting, severe headache, neck stiffness, lethargy, nausea, and sensitivity to light.

Meningitis usually peaks in late winter and early spring, overlapping the flu season, and its symptoms can be easily mistaken for the flu.

Due to the quick progression of the infection, students should seek medical care immediately if they experience two or more of these symptoms at the same time. If left untreated, meningitis can lead to shock and death within hours of the initial symptoms.

PREVENTION

HOW DO YOU PREVENT

MENINGITIS?

There are currently 2 vaccines available which provide protection against 4 subtypes of meningococcus—A, C, Y, and W-135. The vaccine is recommended for adolescents ages 11 through 18 years. The CDC now recommends that all adolescents who were first vaccinated at ages 11-12 years need a booster at age 16 and all teens who were vaccinated at ages 13-15 need a booster at ages 16-18. Young adults ages 19-21 who are living in on-campus housing should get a booster dose if their previous dose was given before age 16 years.

The University of Pittsburgh Student Health Service can provide these vaccines for a fee.

HOW SAFE IS THE VACCINE?

Side effects of the vaccine are mild and consist primarily of redness or pain for one to two days where the shot was given. The vaccine should not be given during an acute illness or to those who have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the meningococcal vaccine or to one of the vaccine components. Pregnant women should consult with their physician regarding the risks and benefits of immunization.

DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

Yes. The vaccine is 85% to 100% effective at preventing infection from the subtypes of meningococcus found in the vaccine (A, C, Y, and W-135). The vaccine does not protect against serogroup B meningococcus, which causes about one third of all meningococcus cases in the United States.

HOW CAN COLLEGE

STUDENTS FURTHER PROTECT THEMSELVES?

Students can maximize their immune system by eating a balanced diet, exercising, and getting adequate amounts of sleep. Also, avoid excessive use of cigarettes and alcohol, in particular, do not make a habit of sharing drinks and cigarettes.